

A NEW CROP IN SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

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San Luis Obispo County has increased from zero to 907 acres of avocados in the past eight years. The acreage is divided in the following varieties: Hass, 699 acres; Bacon, 148 acres; and Zutano, 50 acres with approximately 20 acres of miscellaneous varieties.

The main acreage is located in the foothill area east of the town of Nipomo. Valley locations, where water is available, from Arroyo Grande in the south, to Cambria in the north, have also been planted. Like all new areas, some plantings will be successful, while others are located in either cold spots or too close to the coast, where the chill factor from coastal winds causes poor fruit set on the windward side of trees. Utilization of windbreaks is now beginning to take hold in some districts. Soils vary from fine sandy to heavy clays. The latter could be a problem in the future, due to root rot.

The trend is toward small acreages, from one to ten acres. Some 30 to 50 acre blocks have been planted, but land availability for a large planting is difficult to find, especially if all three criteria (climate, soil and water) for a successful orchard are to be found.

There are approximately 3,000 acres in the county where climate, soil and water will support future plantings. This is contingent upon sales of land or use of land by existing owners, and the economic situation in the avocado industry.

Fruit quality has been good. Harvest for Hass is from July through November, while Bacon and Zutano are generally picked from March through the middle of May.